HAMAS – HOW HAS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION BECOME A POLITICAL POWER?

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HAMAS – HOW HAS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION BECOME A POLITICAL POWER?

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ABSTRACT

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In the beginning of 2006 the first democratic elections in the Palestinian authority ended with a surprising victory by a landslide of Hamas – a recognized terrorist organization.

How did Hamas gain so much power to become the ruling party by democratic elections? Does that mean that the majority of the Palestinian population support terror?

Hamas is similar to other fundamentalist Islamic organizations, mainly by its social network and its aspiration to establish a religious Islamic state. Understanding the source of power and identifying the center of gravity of the Hamas is crucial to understand how Hamas come to power. It's also important for an effective war on terror. Furthermore, this understanding is essential as part of the efforts to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Since any action against Hamas taken by Israel and/or the USA is interpreted and marketed as an attack against Islam, an efficient way to cope with an Islamist fundamentalist organization must involve an active part played by the moderate Arab countries.

HAMAS – HOW HAS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION BECOME A POLITICAL POWER

Follow The Money….

—Anonymous

In January 2006 the first democratic elections for the Palestinian National Authority were held. Many hopes rested upon these elections, not only being the first in history, but also held shortly after the death of Yasser Arafat. Those hopes vanished with Hamas landslide victory, a victory that surprised the Fatach leaders, Israel, the American administration, and even the Hamas leaders themselves.[1] The election resulted in a clear majority of 76 seats of the 132-member Parliament.

How did an organization that had been recognized as a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States[2], Canada, and some European countries, win democratic elections in a Palestinian society that had not defined itself as particularly religious?[3] As a religious Muslim organization, Hamas has characteristics similar to those of other Fundamentalist groups, mainly the use of the Koran and the call for Jihad as central tools in the organization's way to achieve its goals. Are the election results a part of the global rise of Islamic fundamentalism over the last few years, or is it a unique phenomenon of the Palestinian society?

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) that was established after the 1993 Oslo agreements is in a continuous process of building the Palestinian state. This process received validation at the 2007 Annapolis[4] convention with the declaration by the Prime Minister of Israel that the Palestinian people have a right to their own state side-by-side with Israel[5]. However, peace agreements may be reached and signed by leaders, but they are executed, fostered, and kept by peoples. It is therefore important to have an

understanding of Palestinian society, and especially the reasons for the rise of Hamas. It is crucial as part of the attempt to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is even more so in the present time of enhanced efforts and increased international involvement after the Annapolis convention. Such understanding can help choose the appropriate course of action toward finding a long term and lasting solution to the conflict. Furthermore, in the era of Global War On Terror (GWOT), understanding the power base of a terrorist organization is of great importance beyond the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The fact that Israel and the Western countries were so surprised by the rise of Hamas points to a gap in the understanding of the Hamas base of power, a gap that must be reduced or eliminated in the future as part of the international effort to fight terror effectively.

This paper's thesis is that social reasons were the main factors affecting voting patterns of the Palestinian public. The result of the elections is, therefore, a civil protest and does not mean that the Palestinian public as a whole supports the way of terror or seeks to withdraw recognition of the state of Israel. That means that the power base of Hamas is not ideology, but the social economic situation in the PNA. This understanding, which I will elaborate, is fundamental, and in this case, contradicts President Bush's definition that every terrorist organization's center of gravity is its ideology. Beyond the regional meaning of solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, examining this issue can bring some insights to the role of the moderate Arab countries in coping with fundamentalist Islamic organizations, like Hamas.

The *Dawa*

The appearance of the Palestinian Islamic organizations is part of the wider phenomenon of Islamic revival in the Middle East during the 1970's and 1980's. The

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revitalization of Islamism[6] was a reflection of the failure of the Arab world to modernize and to meet the current age. In addition, it was a defensive battle against Western modernity and the decay of traditional values. The disappointment created by the failure of the authoritarian Arab regimes to provide solutions to the aggregation of social and economic hardships, with the escalating processes of urbanization and education, has pushed the masses towards religion and the Islamic movements. The Islamic movements knew how to give the alienated masses in the cities a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging to a framework for life with a destiny and purpose. The Middle East war in 1967 was a turning point in the process of Islamic revival. It symbolized the downfall of the Arab regimes that lost territories to Israel, which was perceived as a Western bridgehead aiming to crumble Islam. This war and the subsequent Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank provided the political and socioeconomic background for the appearance of the Palestinian Islamic movements.[7]

Hamas, the Arabic word for zeal, is the acronym of *al-Harakat al-Muqawwama al-Islamiyya*—the Islamic Resistance Movement. The group was established by the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) at the outset of the first Palestinian uprising (intifada) in late 1987. It provided a vehicle for the MB's participation in the violent confrontation against Israel without exposing the MB and its wide network of social welfare and religious institutions to Israeli retaliation.[8] Hamas combines Palestinian nationalism with Islamic fundamentalism. Its founding charter commits the group to the destruction of Israel, the replacement of the PNA with an Islamist state based on rules of Islam and to raise "*the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine*"[9] (including Israeli sovereign territory).

Hamas also seeks to counter what it perceives as the secularization and Westernization of Arab society and to become internationally recognized as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, a distinction held by the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) since 1974. Hamas' slogan, as declared in Article 8 of their charter, reflects the centrality of violent Jihad[10] to their strategies: "*Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes.*"[11]

The MB movement has been active in the Gaza strip and the West Bank since the 1970's. Led by Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Yassin, it focused on building social and cultural institutions and on educational activities to "prepare the hearts" and reshape Muslim Palestinian society – one of the basic principals of MB doctrine. These activities are the essence of the *Dawa* – the Hamas' social network of welfare institutions. Yassin believed that as long as he focused on the cultural and social issues, he could enjoy relative freedom of action from the Israeli regime and would not invoke any political resistance from within Palestinian society. Indeed, in 1978 the Israeli military government acknowledged his social activity. That acknowledgment facilitated the spreading of *Dawa* cells through Gaza. These cells focused on enlarging the circle of support for the movement, using the growing frustration of the population, especially the young population, with the harsh social and economic reality in the Gaza Strip, as opposed to the modernity and prosperity of the neighboring Israeli society. *Dawa* institutions, which included schools, kindergartens, clinics, educational centers, Koran lessons, mosques, and help to the needy in various other fields, were established with donation money. The donations were raised mainly from the Persian Gulf states. This

financial support was motivated by different reasons: supporting the idea of a Muslim society; explicit support of terrorist activities against Israel by Iran; and the wish to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians by different Muslim organizations from the Persian Gulf states, the USA and Europe.[12] This was a central element in financing the Palestinian MB activities, which would later become Hamas.[13] Over the years, the social activities of Hamas through the *Dawa* institutions have created a situation in which many poor families depend on the institutions for their existence and support. Thus a poor Palestinian family in the West Bank or Gaza might send a child to a Hamas school on a Hamas bus, use a low-cost Hamas medical clinic, play soccer at a Hamas sports club and perhaps rely on a ration of Hamas rice.[14]

The financing of the *Dawa* institutions is based on the centrality of charity in Islam, and, therefore, many Muslim institutions raise money for the organization. Raising money is in fact calling for "economic Jihad," (*al-Jihad bil-mal*) a phrase that features prominently in their fundraising techniques. The concept is simple in practice. Radical leaders claim their followers have a religious duty to engage in Jihad – either by physically fighting Islam's enemies or by supporting those who do. Proponents of this logic ground their position in a Koranic verse in Surah 9 (*al-Tawbah*) Verse 41: "*Fight with your possessions and your souls in the way of Allah."* For the purpose of expediency, "possessions" typically translates as "money."[15] According to estimates contained in the U. S. FBI testimony to Congress, the organization raised about $30 million in 2003. Israeli intelligence estimates that each year the organization raises about $50 million. Most of the money that is raised is delivered to *Dawa* institutions and only a small portion of the money, which mainly comes from Iran with the support of the

Iranian government, is directly delivered to the military wing of the organization for financing terror activities. In reality, funding the *Dawa* institutions is a way to launder money for terror activities.[16]

The prolonged social activities of the organization created the situation that appeared at the election. It was the second generation that had been raised and educated in Hamas institutions, and met with these institutions daily, which elected Hamas to power. Some argue that the social activity of Hamas, through the *Dawa* organizations, is meant to ease the situation of the Palestinians and is a humanitarian justification for the continuation of funding the Hamas. However, seeing *Dawa* as merely a social organization is a naive perspective that disregards what has been happening within the *Dawa* institutions themselves.[17] As described by one of the Fatach former leaders "not the *Izz ad-Din al-Qassam* raised the warriors, it was the *Dawa* which raised them."[18] The concept of *Dawa* is not unique for Hamas and MB, but appears in different forms or names in other fundamentalist Muslim organizations such as Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda. In fact it constitutes a social network aimed to replace the local government in the future. The idea to create a network of institutions that would form the future government is derived from Mao's theory for people's revolution.[19] Indeed, one of the key elements of a Maoist insurgency is the construction of shadow political, police, and administrative organizations that operate concurrently and cooperatively with the destructive military aspects of the campaign.

Hamas falsely presents its three wings – the political wing, the social wing based on the *Dawa*, and the military wing called *Izz ad-Din al-Qassam* Brigades as separate bodies. In fact, the *Dawa* institutions constitute the main source of funding and recruiting

for the military wing. They do this through propaganda in educational institutes and in mosques and financial support for the families of suicide bombers and of those who were killed in activities against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, one of the founders of Hamas, describes suicide bombers as *Istishyhadi*, or *Shaheed*, which means self-chosen martyrdom . Martyrdom or self-sacrificing is perceived as a religious virtue. Rantisi emphasizes that the leaders of the movement do not force the young to go on suicide missions; they only give them religious permission to do so.[20] Furthermore, suicide actions are glorified in the educational institutions, the media, and in daily services at mosques. In addition, financial support to the families of suicide bombers is displayed publicly so that potential recruits know that they need not worry for their families' livelihood. The three wings have mutual linkage; the political wing is fully involved in both the social and the military activities. Rantisi's description of the "spiritual permission" for the suicide actions demonstrates the direct connection between the organization's leadership and the actions of the military wing. The fact that Hamas stopped terrorist activities against Israel in the period right before the elections in the PNA, at the order of the political wing, constitutes further substantial evidence for the ability of the political wing to control and direct the actions of the military wing. The political wing is clearly running the organization and is involved in all its activities. Furthermore, the political wing obeys the *Majlis al-Shura*, or consultative council, located in Damascus, that outlines the organization's policy.[21]

Hamas is organized on a system that is designed and operated to achieve its goals. According to Hamas' chart, the end state is establishing an Islamic religious state based on *Shariah* law over all the land of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capitol. The

political use of the Koran along with the military wing and the *Dawa* institutions are the means. The call for Jihad against Israel, supplying a network of social services, various kinds of terrorist activities and a developed propaganda are the ways. To counter this system, a better understanding of it is required.

A New Kind of Terrorist Organization

Hamas defines itself as a national-religious organization, and not as a terrorist organization. So do its followers and supporters within the Palestinian public and outside of it. Since the course of action for coping with an organization derives from our definition of it, an exact definition of the organization is needed.

The IDF dictionary defines terror as

> The use of violence (or threat of such use) against individuals (mainly peaceful and innocent civilians) or against property. Terror is meant to terrify governments and societies and to coerce them into taking actions that would achieve the political goals and/or the social, ideological or religious goals of its operators.[22]

This definition, similar to that of the United Nations',[23] focuses on actions targeting civilians. There is no doubt that the acts of hostility committed by this organization are terror activities, particularly the training and employment of suicide bombers which are considered by the organization leaders to be a strategic weapon. Its leaders have called suicide attacks the "F-16" of the Palestinian people.[24] The extensive interagency action of Israel's defense elements has resulted in a substantial reduction in the terror activities of suicide bombers since 2004. As an alternative, Hamas has enhanced the manufacture of *Qassam* rockets and increased the amount of launches towards civilian targets in Israel, thus replacing the suicide bomber with the *Qassam* rocket. It is true that a single *Qassam* rocket does not cause a large number of casualties in a single

incident the way a suicide bomber would, but using attacks by *Qassam* rockets has a psychological affect over a large population. Today thousands of Israeli citizens are within range of *Qassam* rockets, and there are populated areas in Israel that are bombed daily. Since the withdrawal from the Gaza strip in August 2005 until the end of 2007, more than 2000 rockets had been fired by Hamas toward Israel. This number does not include rockets launched by other organizations from Hamas' dominated territory, with Hamas' approval. [25]

Defining Hamas as a terrorist organization according to the IDF or UN definitions is not complete, because it overlooks the view of the Palestinian public and ignores the social and cultural context of the organization. The definition categorizes an organization as illegitimate by Israel, the USA, and the UN, yet its supporters consider legitimate. This view deepens the division between the Palestinians and Israel and the rest of the Western world, and reinforces Hamas' claim that Israel and the Western world are the enemies of Islam. In addition, focusing on that definition does not explain how Hamas was able to win the sympathy of the Palestinian public in the last few years, as opposed to a relatively low rate of sympathy in its first years of existence, and in the first few years after the Oslo agreements.[26] Another weakness of this definition is an inappropriate treatment of the structure of the military wing. Terrorist organizations are usually organized in small cells and do not have a formal military structure.[27] This description is inappropriate for the Hamas military wing that in the last few years has become organized with a structured chain of command and a structure based on defined and functional units, like in an orderly military organization.

In his article, Michael Morris quotes a proposal for a different kind of definition for certain terrorist organizations called *pansurgency* :

> an organized movement of non-state actors aimed at the overthrow of values, cultures, or societies on a global level through the use of subversion and armed conflict, with the ultimate goal of establishing a new world order.[28]

The main advantage of this definition is that it explains the phenomenon from a wide perspective – the terrorist activities are not only aimed at achieving political goals, but the organization's goal is to establish a new order by removing the culture and value system of the attacked and to impose the culture and value system of the attacking organization instead. The removal of the value system of the attacked is done by acts of violence and that is the purpose of the terror activities. This definition does not only focus on the type of targets being attacked – civilians and civil targets, but points to the organization's intent to act at the pan-social level. The armed struggle is an inseparable part of the organization's means; it is the means to an end. The weakness of this definition is the absence of the word terror.

Theoretically, an armed struggle aimed at the goal of achieving political ambitions can be accepted as legitimate ("one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"[29]), but that is not the central point: the central point is that there is nothing in the fact of occupation that justifies the targeting, threatening, and killing of civilians.[30] According to the U.N. definition, an armed struggle that includes terror activities is not a justified legitimate means to any end. In addition to using terror, Hamas has other means by which to establish the value system that would sweep the crowds and achieve its ends. The use of the Koran, the *Dawa* institutions, and the reliance on *Sharia* law constitute the way of action and the means by which to establish the cultural and value system of

the organization not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but also in the other land it claims - Israel!

Morris's definition explains why the fight against terror nowadays is not only a fight against the activists themselves, but as defined by President Bush, "both a battle of arms and a battle of ideas."[31]

Coping with that kind of organization is much more complicated than with simple or pure terrorist organizations, where usually arresting or eliminating the central leaders can bring about the elimination of the entire organization. An example of this is the Red Brigades organization, which was a significant terrorist organization in the 1980's, but after most of its leaders had been arrested or eliminated, ceased to exist. Hamas, however, was not eliminated after the elimination of its central leaders and founders of both the military and political wings. Though Morris in his article refers to Al-Qaeda and its global ambitions, the definition fits Hamas and its ambitions in the region perfectly. This definition expresses Hamas' ambition to establish a religious Islamic state over the entire territory of Israel, an ambition that includes a statement not only against Western culture and values, but also against the secularity of Muslim society as represented by the Fatach and the PNA.

Hamas and the PNA

As mentioned earlier, in order to understand the reasons that enabled Hamas to achieve victory, we need to look at Palestinian society from a holistic approach. At first glance, one might erroneously think that the main reason for Hamas' success is its ideology based on a radical position against Israel. The fact that Hamas did not receive much public support in the 1990's, when the Palestinian public was hopeful for the

future after the Oslo agreements, points to the fact that the majority of the Palestinian public supports the idea of having a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. Further support comes from the fact that Hamas itself concealed its position toward Israel during the recent election campaign. When Hamas chose to participate in the general election, its campaign focused not on the conflict with Israel but on the slogan "change and reform."[32] In addition, Hamas restrained its fighters from attacking Israel and rival Palestinian militants to not disrupt the balloting. Hamas perceived the Palestinian elections as one of its means to gain power but did not renounce the armed struggle. Thus, participating in the Palestinian election was a tactical move that never implied the renouncement of violence or the acceptance of democracy and its rules or values.[33]

Ideology by itself is not sufficient to persuade the masses, especially if this is an extremist ideology, such as Hamas'. In every society, there always have been extremists, and there always will be. The real question is how does such an extreme ideology become so sweeping that it can range from recruiting suicide bombers to a landslide victory in democratic elections. Using an analogy from Sun Tzu's theory,[34] ideology is like the element of fire in nature, an element that always exists and cannot be removed completely. The real battle is against the elements that allow the fire to burn and spread. Where there are no flammable materials, or there is a lack of oxygen, the fire would not burn – but it is still an element of nature. So are ideologies, and thus, the "battle of ideas" is battling the elements that enable the flourishing and spreading of radical ideologies, and not necessarily battling the ideology itself.

The decade preceding the 2006 elections was filled with significant events for Palestinian society. It started with many hopes after the Oslo agreements in 1993, followed by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the return of Yasser Arafat to Gaza and the West Bank. The second Intifada started in 2000 and included severe terrorist attacks claiming a high number of Israeli casualties and resulting in a harsh Israeli reaction in the areas of the West Bank in 2002. It ended with Arafat's death in 2004. Since the Palestinian society has not yet formed its identity and is still in the middle of a power struggle, it is unstable, irregular and inconsistent, and as a system it is an Interactive Complexity.[35] This is the reason that understanding the processes within Palestinian society requires a systemic rather than systematic approach – we have to examine the components of the society and the interrelations among them in a holistic way. Understanding the Palestinian political system requires a retrospective look.

Establishing the PNA in June 1994 was an unprecedented historical achievement for the national Palestinian movement. For the first time there was an autonomous Palestinian authority over parts of the land they consider Palestine – the West Bank and Gaza, even though they had not yet gained full sovereignty. That was a life-altering event in the history of the Palestinian national struggle. The PNA was based on the Fatach movement, which was a secular political movement whose main goal was the liberation of Palestine. This movement, led by Yasser Arafat, was the main component of the PLO, which in 1974 was recognized by the Arab world as the representative of the Palestinian people. This recognition created the identification of the Fatach with the PLO, and from that moment on, Yasser Arafat was recognized as the national leader of

the Palestinians. Local Islamic organizations, led by the Palestinian branch of the MB, opposed this recognition of Fatach for two main reasons. First, they saw this recognition as an easy escape for the Arab countries from their responsibility in solving the Palestinian problem; a problem that should be addressed, in their opinion, by the entire Arab world and not just by Palestinian representatives. Second, since the Fatach leaders had not lived under Israeli occupation, but in Arab countries, they were perceived as an external leadership who did not understand the real hardships of the Palestinians. In the local organizations' view, the representatives of the PLO should be elected by the Palestinian people who lived under Israeli occupation. After Hamas had been established, it claimed, mainly against Yasser Arafat, that Fatach was not the true representative of the Palestinian people. Rather only the leadership that had grown from within and suffered the Palestinian's suffering could really be the national leadership of the Palestinian people. This position is one of the origins of the tension and animosity between the Hamas and the Fatach organizations. Over the years, there have been several attempts to include Hamas in the PLO institutions, but all of them failed, mainly because Arafat was not willing to give Hamas more than a small number of representatives. Arafat (who was not religious) objected to a greater involvement of Hamas because, among other reasons, he objected to Hamas' goal to establish a religious Islamic state, and he feared the rise in power of the Islamic movements in the Palestinian leadership.[36] Arafat knew how to use the special status he was gaining to deepen his power base and his grasp of the Palestinian political arena in a way that grew similar to the authoritarian regime that characterized the Arab regimes. The dominance and hegemony of the Fatach in the PLO made it difficult to tell them apart.[37]

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The signing of the Oslo agreements in 1993 and establishing the PNA deepened the split between Hamas and Fatach. Hamas viewed the Oslo agreements as a betrayal and some said that Arafat's goal was to join forces with Israel and the USA in order to eliminate the Hamas organization. Arafat, who returned from exile to Gaza and the West Bank as a result of the Oslo agreements, was welcomed with gratitude and many hopes. Implementing the agreements and transferring sovereignty over parts of the West Bank to the PNA constituted an important first confidence-building step for the Palestinian people. They could see that change was coming and they would be getting a state. The expression of this optimism was the support of the PNA and Arafat, who was elected president in 1996. At that time, surveys showed only 15% of the population supported Hamas.[38]

Over the years, and with the increase in Arafat's and Fatach's power, corruption increased among Fatach's leaders. When those leaders became the leaders of the PNA, the corruption increased. Even though the Palestinian people supported Arafat initially, in an internal survey conducted the year he was elected for presidency, 49% of the people said they thought the authority was corrupt. Toward the end of the 1990's 83% of the people in the PNA, thought the authority was corrupt, and there was a decline in satisfaction with the performance of the authority. At the same time, surveys showed an increase in the support of terror among the Palestinian people.[39] In the second half of the 1990's Hamas increased terrorist activities against Israel, especially after the murder of Prime Minister Rabin, in order to thwart the peace process. At the same time it directed its criticism against Arafat in three main areas: his personal corruption and corruption of the regime; the lack of representation of local leaders in the

PNA; and forsaking the armed battle against Israel. Hamas' claims found a sympathetic ear with the Palestinian public mainly because of the corruption of the regime and insufficient progress toward establishing the Palestinian state. The escalation of terror in these years brought pressure on Arafat from both Israel and the USA to enforce law and order in the PNA and to act against Hamas' terrorist activities. In response, the PNA arrested about 1000 Hamas activists, who, according to some sources, were tortured by the PNA and forced to shave their beards (a humiliation for a religious man). These actions increased tension between Fatach and Hamas. The latter increased its propaganda against Arafat, claiming that, by his actions, he was betraying the Palestinian people to please the USA and Israel.[40]

Until the second Intifada the Israeli policy had been based on Yitzhak Rabin's view that: "*Israel should fight terrorism as if there were no negotiations and should negotiate as if there were no terrorism.*" This strategy was based on the concept of "peace before security," in other words, based on the proposition that the only way to end the violence is through a negotiated peace agreement that will nullify the reason for terrorism. [41]

The new wave of terrorism brought a change in the Israeli policy – security before peace, and eventually led to the collapse of the Oslo agreements.[42] As part of this policy Israel executed tough measures against the PNA, including entering Palestinian cities for searches, attacking PNA infrastructures, arresting many Hamas and Fatach activists that were involved in terrorist activities, and eliminating leaders from the military and political wings of Hamas, including Hamas's spiritual leader Ahmad Yassin in 2004. These measures exacerbated the situation. Israel claimed that Arafat was not doing enough to stop terror, and therefore it was impossible to continue the implementation of

the Oslo agreements. Arafat was perceived by the U. S. government as an obstacle to the implementation of the Oslo agreements and the man who prevented the moderates within the Fatach from enforcing law and order and acting against terrorism. In accordance with Israeli demands and due to American pressure, the PNA's leadership structure was changed and a prime minister was appointed. The prime minister was supposed to be in charge of domestic administration in the PNA, but Arafat never gave full authority to the prime minister and he personally continued to command the security forces. To his last day, Arafat preferred to die under siege rather than go down in history as a traitor and would not turn against Hamas.[43]

The Israeli view of security before peace brought the Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon to declare in 2003 a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip, a withdrawal that was executed in the summer of 2005. The Israeli government believed this withdrawal would strengthen international legitimacy for Israel's position.

The collapse of the Oslo agreements, the corruption of Arafat's regime, the PNA's dysfunction, and Israel's actions against terror created a situation in which the conditions of the average Palestinian civilian worsened. On one hand, the PNA was not perceived as a reliable institution capable of changing the situation. On the other hand, Hamas was perceived as being reliable. It stuck to its principles as declared in Hamas' charter; its leaders were perceived as incorruptible and Israel's withdrawal from Gaza was perceived as a victory of the armed struggle. All this reinforced the public's support of Hamas' position.[44] Furthermore, in contrast to the Fatach, Hamas managed a smooth transition from their older leadership (many of whom were killed or arrested by Israel) to younger successors. Incorporating individuals carrying moral authority into the ranks of

senior officials, allowed Hamas to project an image of responsibility, sobriety, and pragmatism that helped smooth its path to victory.[45]

The activities of the *Dawa* had effectively replaced the dysfunctional aspects of the PNA, and its lack of ability to take care of the population's needs. Thus, Hamas was perceived as having greater feasibility and being more effective than the PNA in fulfilling the needs of the Palestinian population. Furthermore, the public perceived the security forces of the PNA as corrupt and ineffective, as opposed to the Hamas' military wing, which was perceived effective due to the Israeli withdrawal.

Since social network plays a critical role in the human decisionmaking process,[46] the centrality of the *Dawa* in everyday life, on top of massive propaganda that includes television programs for infants justifying the armed struggle and glorifying *Shaheed,* enabled Hamas to spread its doctrine effectively. Furthermore, the centrality of the Koran in the Hamas ideology and the religious context of almost every action ease the distribution of the messages. In fact, the Koran and the *Dawa* became central means of strategic communication, shaping public opinion

The results of the elections for the local authorities, held in the summer of 2005, indicated the influence of the *Dawa* institutions on the Palestinian public. In most of the places where *Dawa* institutions were widespread, such as in Gaza and some of the cities' centers, Hamas candidates won. In rural areas of the West Bank, where *Dawa* institutions were less developed, the Fatach candidates won. Those results encouraged Hamas leadership to participate in the general elections held in January 2006, in spite of disagreements within the organization. Furthermore, Hamas' leaders thought that a

possible victory in the national elections would compel the international community to call off the economic sanctions imposed on Hamas as a terrorist organization.[47]

The Clausewitzian Trinity and the Center of Gravity

Interpreting the nature, essence and conduct of war, Clausewitz describes a triple connection with three aspects: "a paradoxical trinity with three aspects: the people, the commander and his army, and the government."[48] This interpretation includes the basic components of society and enables a holistic way of examining society; almost anything is connected to the interconnections of the trinity components. Even though Clausewitz relates his interpretation to the state level, this definition also fits the PNA that is in the middle of the ongoing process of building the Palestinian state. It also fits Hamas, which has a distinct organizational structure, a political, military and social wing, even though it has been a non-state actor.
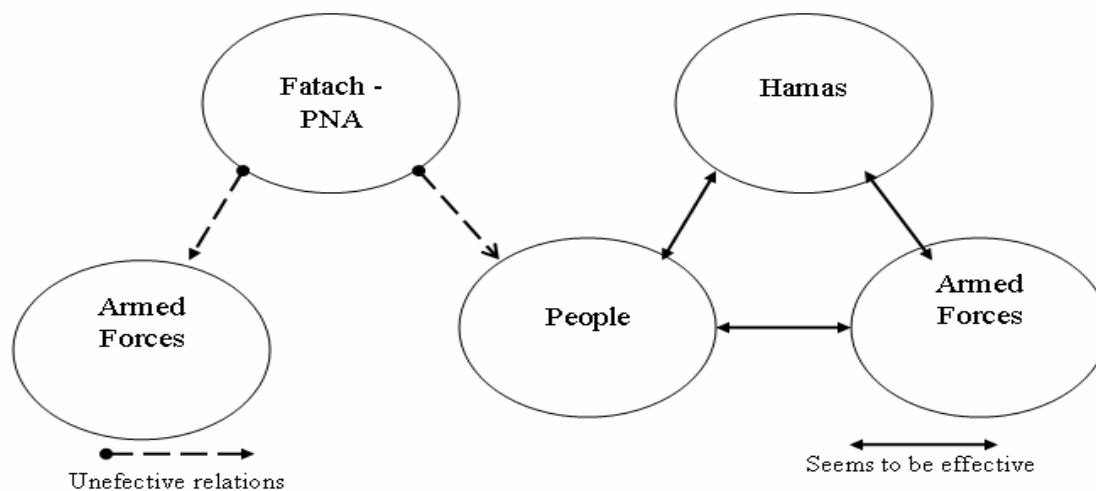

Figure 1.

Figure 1 summarizes the process the Palestinian public has undergone over the last decade. The fact that a large part of the population viewed the PNA and its security forces as ineffective in meeting their basic needs, coupled with the feeling that Hamas

could be a better alternative, drove the Palestinians from a high support of Fatach in the early 90's, to a vote of confidence in Hamas, which was perceived as reliable and able to lead reform in the PNA.

According to the U. S. national strategy for combating terrorism,[49] fighting terror includes fighting the organization's ideology, but in Hamas' case ideology did not enable victory but rather the public's disappointment from the Fatach organization that founded and controlled the PNA. Therefore, the center of gravity that enabled Hamas rise to power was the public's belief in Hamas' ability to institute reform and not a support for the organization's ideology supporting terror. Hamas' ideology has not changed since the time it was established. A decade ago, Palestinian support for the organization was not so high. Something other than ideology must have made the public support the organization, and that was the PNA weakness coupled with the alternative supplied by Hamas mainly in the shape of the social network of *Dawa* institutions.

Hamas believes that the rule of Islam, or the *Sharia*, is a sufficient guide for all areas of life and so it tries to make Islam its program.[50] Since the organization's view is that "Islam is the solution" – drawing on an unreal yet appealing religious ideal,[51] opposing the organization's ideology might be interpreted as opposing Islam. This is the way it is viewed by Hamas, and it emphasizes this interpretation in its propaganda, as can be seen in signs carried in some of the demonstrations organized by Hamas in the Gaza Strip saying: "Behead those who insult Islam."[52] Thus, going against Hamas ideology achieves the opposite outcome; it helps the organization recruit more supporters, convinced by the propaganda that Israel and its supporters, mainly the USA, are a threat to Islam and so every believer is obligated to take part in the Jihad.

Sheila Jager describes the importance of understanding the cultural context within COIN (counterinsurgency). Hamas' ideology offers a National Identity[53] and so going against the organization's ideology is challenging the identity of the believers. Thus, the center of gravity for coping with Hamas as a pansurgency organization is by dealing with the factors that lead the believers to accept the organization's ideology. In terms of the metaphor of fire used earlier, the elements that caused the fire – the corruption and ineffectiveness of the PNA coupled with an extensive social network of Hamas, are the center of gravity – not the ideology of Hamas.

<u>The Way Ahead</u>

The creation of a strategy to combat Hamas must include three components: strengthening the PNA, solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by establishing a Palestinian state side-by-side with the state of Israel, and persevering in the fight against the elements invoking and conducting terror – the military wing of Hamas. Coping with Hamas is not possible without succeeding in every one of these components. However, the first element to address is strengthening the PNA. Without a strong PNA, not only would it be impossible to cope with Hamas, but it would also cause the failure of the second element. No agreement could be achieved with Israel, and that would hinder the realization of the Palestinian dream of having their own state and would ultimately only strengthen Hamas.

Strengthening the PNA is a four element endeavor: economic support; strengthening the leadership; achieving the support of the moderate Arab countries; and confidence-building measures (CBM) made by Israel.

Economic Support The economic imbalance between the legitimate PNA and Hamas must be addressed. After Hamas' victory, and based on its continuous refusal to acknowledge the state of Israel and to honor previous agreements (mainly the Oslo agreements from 1993 and the Road Map from 2002), coupled with it being a recognized terrorist organization, Israel withheld transferring tax money to the PNA, and caused the USA and the EU to freeze the financial aid to the PNA. This has weakened the PNA position. Hamas, on the other hand, has received enhanced donations from Arab countries, mainly Iran and Saudi Arabia (unlike Iran, donations from Saudi Arabia are not formal but through charity organizations), thus strengthening the *Dawa* institutions and making them the only source for supplying the basic needs of the local population. The international community's agreement, achieved following the Annapolis convention, to allocate $7.4 billion to the PNA (led by EU, USA and Saudi Arabia),[54] is the first step in re-building the PNA into an effective and coherent government. This aid should be accompanied by close supervision from the donating countries to ensure the regulation of procedures and to avoid corruption in the PNA. The PNA should focus on two efforts – one is rebuilding the Palestinian police force, and the other is building effective social institutions, especially in the Gaza Strip. The PNA should focus on the Gaza Strip, to counter its obvious weakness there, and to prove to the Palestinian public its governmental effectiveness relative to the *Dawa* institutions. Israel should also join the efforts of the international community and transfer the withheld tax money to the PNA. This transfer of funds would also be made under international supervision to ensure these funds are not being used for armament or diverted towards financing terrorist activities. Hand in hand with building the economic capabilities of the PNA,

Israel should cease the economic embargo on the Gaza Strip. Improving the economic situation in the Gaza Strip should be one of Israel's interests. A fundamental improvement in the economic conditions of the residents of the Gaza Strip, achieved by the PNA itself, might see a reduction in the prominence of the *Dawa* institutions, which are the main tool of propaganda for Hamas. Correspondingly, there is a need for an international call, led by the USA, to the Arab countries to stop the support by different organizations for the *Dawa* institutions, and to direct that support to the PNA institutions. The social services of a state should be given by the state. Diverting the donations contributed for the welfare of the Palestinian people to the a social network of the PNA instead of the *Dawa* institutes, would help eliminate the undesirable situation of having "a state within a state," while upholding the concept of charity, which is one of the pillars of Islam.

    <u>Strengthening the Leadership of the PNA</u> In the eyes of many Palestinians, the president, Abu Mazen, is perceived as weak, as representing the old generation, and as incapable of following the footsteps of Yasser Arafat as the leader of the Palestinian People.[55] On the other hand, Marwan Barghouti, the senior leader of the younger generation of the Fatach, who is currently incarcerated in an Israeli penitentiary, is perceived by many Palestinians as having suitable leadership skills and the ability to be an alternative leader. Therefore, Israel should, as an exception, deviate from its policy of not releasing prisoners with "blood on their hands," free Marwan Barghouti and enable him to join the PNA leadership within the Fatach. Delaying freeing Barghouti while terrorist attacks against Israel have increased since the Annapolis convention and Israel's reaction to those attacks, might cause Barghouti to toughen his position and,

therefore, the earlier his release the better. Furthermore, Barghouti's release would be a substantial CBM toward the PNA.

Support from moderate Arab Countries As the king of Jordan has said the agreement of the Arab countries to recognize Israel and the participation of many of them in the Annapolis convention have been a major landmark.[56] This agreement, combined with their interest in ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, should bring them to support the PNA and act to strengthen it. The rise of Hamas has meaning beyond the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It means an inner struggle within Islamic society as to the essence of the state, whether the state should be an Islamic state based on religious law, or whether it should be based on the separation of religion from the government. Should the Palestinian state follow the Egyptian model or the Iranian model? If this is linked to the fact that the Western countries going against Hamas is interpreted and marketed as going against Islam, only the active involvement of the moderate Arab countries, to the point of them leading the process, can be effective within Muslim society. The Arab countries should make a stand and act to strengthen the PNA and to promote establishing the Palestinian state on the principle of separating religion from government. The USA should convince the Arab countries to take a more active part in the process. The main role of the USA, in addition to the financial aid, should be in chaperoning the process and ensuring the objectivity of the Arab countries towards the interests of Israel. Putting the Arab countries in the lead would also enable, indirectly, an improvement of the USA image as perceived in Muslim society.[57]

Confidence-building measures (CBM) Strengthening Abu Mazen's status among the Palestinian public, along with strengthening the PNA, are vital interests for Israel

and, at present, are necessary for the success of the process. The Palestinian public, tired from international conventions and talks, expects to see some concrete measurements taking place in the near future. Israel should understand what is expected from Abu Mazen and push the negotiations towards the establishment of a Palestinian state by taking some immediate actions that would buy Abu Mazen a little more time with the Palestinian public. There are a few measures Israel can and should implement immediately. First is continuing to free Palestinian prisoners who were not involved directly in terrorist activities, including Hamas members. Second, Israel should stop objecting to the participation of the Hamas elements in Abu Mazen's government, and should not insist on the precondition of recognizing Israel. Instead, Israel should be satisfied with the commitment of the members of the government to uphold previous agreements and Hamas' offer to 10-year ceasefire, an offer made by some local Hamas' leaders.[58] Such a policy would undermine the connection between Hamas' external leaders led by Haled Mashal that object to such commitment, and the local leadership. In addition, it might cause some of Hamas' leaders to take a more pragmatic approach.

Israel should continue Yitzhak Rabin's policy of fighting relentlessly against terror, while continuing negotiations with the PNA. Only a fortified PNA can enable effective negotiations. The PNA must also take CBM, including condemning terrorist activities, effectively acting against terrorists and acting within Palestinian society to prevent terrorist activities. Both sides should be ready to continue negotiations even if terrorist attacks continue. Each time the negotiations are stopped because of terrorist attacks against Israel, or because of Israeli retaliatory action, it plays into the hands of Hamas,

which is interested in the failure of the process, as is evident from the significant increase in rockets launches against Israel since the Annapolis convention.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The Hamas organization has been recognized by many countries as a terrorist organization, but that name is insufficient in view of the organization's complexity and its real sources of power. The organization's goal is not only to create political change, but to replace the value system of Palestinian society with one that is based on the laws of Islam. In fact, the organization aspires to establish a regional Islamic caliphate. Terrorist activities are one of the ways of action by which this organization strives to achieve its goal, and these actions are justified by religious manipulation. Thus, the organization is a more complex kind of terror organization with considerable military and political influence. In order to find the best ways of coping with it, it should more correctly be classified as a *pansurgency.*

In accordance with this definition, the ways to cope with Hamas should focus not only on the terrorist activists, but also on the mechanisms that enable the recruitment of its followers and the spread of the value system of the organization. In this sense, coping with such an organization is more complicated, and involves both the physical and psychological aspects of fighting terror. The *Dawa* institutions that supply social services to the Palestinian public are the main means on which the organization relies to recruit its followers and to spread its propaganda. The main sources of finance for the organization are funds collected for the *Dawa* institutions, based on the centrality of the value of charity in Islam.

The success of Hamas in the elections did not stem from the support of the Palestinian society for the use of terror but was more a vote of no confidence in the Fatach party, which reigned over the PNA and had become decadent and corrupted. Following the money trail within the Palestinian society over the last few years shows corruption within the authority on the one hand which has been counter-balanced by the *Dawa* institutions on the other to the point where they are thriving. That means that the Palestinian public prefers the effectiveness of the *Dawa* institutions for its social needs. Strengthening the PNA is a key element in coping with Hamas and in trying to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by establishing a Palestinian state side-by-side the state of Israel.

Hamas does not have influence on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict alone. It also represents an intrinsic struggle within Islamic society regarding the nature of the state. Should it be a secular state in which religion is separated from the government, or should it be a religious state like Iran? In this, Hamas is like other extreme Islamic movements such as Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda. The success of this organization and its influence might impact the moderate Arab countries in the area such as Egypt, Jordan, and others. Thus, it is in these countries interests, though it might be an unproclaimed one, to restrain the power of this organization, and establish the Palestinian state as a secular state. Furthermore, since this organization is based on Islamic religious principles, any action by Israel, the USA and/or the West against Hamas is perceived as going against Islam. The tendency of the West, especially in the USA, to emphasize that the war against terror is a war against the Ideology of the organization fortifies the position of the fundamentalist Islamic organizations claiming that the war is against

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Islam, and that in return, strengthens the extreme positions of their followers. Any attempt to influence the public opinion of the Palestinian society by an element related to the West would be difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, a more active involvement by the moderate Arab countries is called for to act against Hamas and to create the conditions required for the establishment of the Palestinian state. The USA strategy in this matter should be based on allocating a more substantial role for the Arab countries in the process, and not to settle with them supporting it from afar, or just supplying financial aid. For the first time Israel and the moderate Arab countries share the same interest on top of wanting to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and it is to stop the spread of the Iranian influence in the area. Restraining Hamas and establishing a secular Palestinian state would serve this interest.

Coping with Hamas as a pansurgency compels a holistic approach that combines the battle of arms and the battle of ideas by incorporating an uncompromising tactical effort against terror with international effort to strengthen the PNA, and the greater involvement of the Arab countries, both to rehabilitate the PNA institutions and to avoid the use of *Dawa* funds. Only by incorporating all of these elements both within the short and the long run would we be able to cope with Hamas effectively. We cannot ignore the results of the elections and the wide support Hamas has gained. Therefore, the object of coping with Hamas is not eliminating it, but the creation of conditions under which it would become more pragmatic to, forsake the way of terror and take a normative part in any future political process.

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